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Thomas Wynn

## COLLABORATION AND AUTHORSHIP IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH THEATER

Theatrical collaboration is often described in morbid terms in the eighteenth century. In Alexis Piron's *Le Fâcheux Veuve* (1725) the poet Abok and the musician Abak jointly sired a son ("Il se nommait Opéra") who promptly died, and each blames the other for his feeble constitution.<sup>1</sup> A similar scenario is found in Pierre-Augustin de Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784), when the clerk Double-Main announces one of the cases to be judged: "Noble, très noble, infiniment noble, *don Pedro George, hidalgo, baron de Los Altos, y Montes Fieros, y Otros Montes*; contre *Alonzo Calderon*, jeune auteur dramatique. Il est question d'une comédie mort-née, que chacun désavoue et rejette sur l'autre."<sup>2</sup> Collaboration may be harmful to more than just the artwork, as evidenced in Voltaire's letter to Nicolas Thieriot of April 23, 1739, in which he refers to a failed collaboration with Jean-Philippe Rameau (D1990): "À l'égard d'un opéra, il n'y a pas d'apparence qu'après l'enfant mort-né de *Samson*, je veuille en faire une autre. Les premières couches m'ont trop blessé."<sup>3</sup> Collaboration, Voltaire implies, endangers the author. The link between morbidity and collaboration was repeated on November 26, 1778, when the Berlin Academy held an extraordinary meeting to commemorate Voltaire, who had died six months earlier. Composed by Frederick II himself, the encomium that was delivered to the assembled academicians described Voltaire's preoccupation with *Irène* in the weeks before his death:

Son usage était d'assujettir ses pièces à la critique la plus sévère, avant de les exposer en public. Conformément à ses principes, il consulta à Paris tout ce qu'il y avait de gens de goût de sa connaissance, sacrifiant un vain amour-propre au désir de rendre ses travaux dignes de la postérité. Docile aux avis éclairés qu'on

1. Alexis Piron, *Le Fâcheux Veuve*, ed. Derek Connon (Liverpool: Liverpool Online Series, 2008) 74–77.

2. Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, ed. Françoise Bagot and Michel Kail (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) 172.

3. Voltaire, *Correspondence and Related Documents*, ed. Theodore Besterman, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, vols. 85–135 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968–77).

lui donna, il se porta avec un zèle et une ardeur singulière à la correction de cette tragédie; il passa des nuits entières à refondre son ouvrage; et soit pour dissiper le sommeil, soit pour ranimer ses sens, il fit un usage immodéré du café: cinquante tasses par jour lui suffirent à peine. Cette liqueur qui mit son sang dans la plus violente agitation, lui causa un échauffement si prodigieux que pour calmer cette espèce de fièvre chaude, il eut recours aux opiates dont il prit de si fortes doses, que loin de soulager son mal, elles accélèrent sa fin. Peu après ce remède pris avec si peu de ménagement, se manifesta une espèce de paralysie qui fut suivie du coup d'apoplexie qui termina ses jours.<sup>4</sup>

Voltaire, it would appear, died as a result of collaboration.<sup>5</sup> His eagerness to rewrite this final tragedy in light of the invited recommendations led, in no uncertain terms, to the death of the author.

The preceding remarks imply that collective literary creation jeopardizes both the status of individual writer and the quality of the work. They seem to confirm the sense that collaboration was disparaged in Old Regime France—La Bruyère notes that “l’on n’a guère vu jusques à présent un chef-d’oeuvre d’esprit qui soit l’ouvrage de plusieurs”<sup>6</sup>—and, as a consequence, to substantiate the claim that there had been little dramatic coauthorship before the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Decentering the first-person narrative of literary creation and focusing on both process and product, this article argues that selective collaboration was in fact an effective means by which an eighteenth-century author might aspire to social recognition and legitimacy. We shall see that collaboration extends beyond coauthorship (such as that

4. *Éloge de Voltaire, lu à l'Académie royale des sciences et belles-lettres de Berlin, dans une assemblée publique extraordinairement convoquée pour cet objet, le 26 novembre 1778* (Berlin, 1778) 48–49. On the creation of *Irène*, see *The Complete Works of Voltaire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968–) 78a, 57–64; hereafter cited as OCV. See also Anne Sanderson, “In the Playwright’s Workshop: Voltaire’s Corrections to *Irène*,” *SVEC* 228 (1984): 129–70.

5. On Voltaire’s death, which was likely caused by prostate cancer, see Jacques Bréhant and Raphaël Roche, *L’Envers du roi Voltaire* (Paris: Nizet, 1989) 185–202; René Pomeau et al., *Voltaire en son temps*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995) 1:615–25; and Renato Galliani, “Quelques faits inédits sur la mort de Voltaire,” *SVEC* 217 (1983): 159–75.

6. Jean de La Bruyère, *Les Caractères* (Paris: Flammarion, 1965) 83.

7. F. W. J. Hemmings, “Co-authorship in French Plays of the Nineteenth Century,” *French Studies* 41 (1987): 43. Hemmings mentions without further investigation collaborations between the abbé Brueys and Jean de Palaprat, and Lesage, Louis Fusélier, Piron, d’Orneval, “and various other minor dramatists” (51).

between Alain-René Lesage and Jacques-Philippe d'Orneval at the *foire*) to encompass a range of collective and consensual practices. The unique voice of the playwright was certainly celebrated in the period, especially at its end, as evidenced in the hymn that Marie-Joseph Chénier composed for the transfer of Voltaire's remains to the Panthéon: "Tes tragiques pinceaux, des Demi-Dieux du Tibre / Ont su ressusciter les antiques vertus; / Et la France a conçu le besoin d'être libre / Aux fiers accents des deux Brutus."<sup>8</sup> Such prizing of the singular and disinterested dramatic vision deliberately occludes, however, the very real practices of collaboration in which the participants' cultural and social capital, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, are traded against each other.<sup>9</sup>

The author's perceived emancipation in the eighteenth century is a truism of much criticism and scholarship. Bourdieu, for instance, evokes the period's learned societies and clubs of aristocratic society, and describes the relationship between cultural producers and the dominant class in terms of direct dependence and allegiance from which there was a "lutte pour l'indépendance";<sup>10</sup> Paul Bénichou has argued that the period was a golden age for writers, in that their position "hors des affaires" allowed them to enjoy unprecedented prestige and authority;<sup>11</sup> and John Lough has noted that by the second half of the century, writers exercised "immense power" and claimed "a social function of the highest importance."<sup>12</sup> Recent scholarship has, however, examined how the eighteenth-century author engaged in self-fashioning *within* collective institutions and enterprises; Gregory Brown has examined how legitimacy (i.e., authority, credibility, and respect) was achieved and enhanced inside the Comédie-Française and the Société des auteurs dramatiques,<sup>13</sup> and Geoffrey Turnovsky has explored strategies of legitimization within a market-driven print industry.<sup>14</sup> While these studies have certainly reframed authorial

8. Marie-Joseph Chénier, *Hymne sur la translation du corps de Voltaire* (Paris: Bossange, l'an II) 3.

9. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 81–92. This article was originally published in German.

10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992) 76–78.

11. Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain 1750–1830* (Paris: José Corti, 1973) 40.

12. John Lough, *Writer and Public in France from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 244, 246.

13. Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005); Brown, *Literary Sociability and Literary Property in France, 1775–1793: Beaumarchais, the Société des auteurs dramatiques and the Comédie Française* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

14. Geoffrey Turnovsky, *The Literary Market: Authorship and Modernity in the Old Regime* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2010).

self-presentation in the early modern period, the strategic use of collaboration remains a neglected aspect of self-fashioning even though, as Joan DeJean has observed (primarily with reference to the seventeenth-century novel), “in Old Régime France, collaboration was so common that few writers can be said never to have participated in any way in a collaborative venture.”<sup>15</sup> But whereas the changing nature of collaborative writing in early modern England has been examined,<sup>16</sup> comparable practices on the other side of the Channel have yet to be analyzed.<sup>17</sup> In addition to illuminating the means by which texts were created and authors sought legitimacy, an analysis of eighteenth-century collaboration might also—in light of Michel Foucault’s observation that the individuation of authorship determines the meaning and value we ascribe to the texts<sup>18</sup>—recast our understanding of the literary text.

Collaboration seems incompatible with the sense prevalent in the eighteenth century that an author’s legitimacy was ostensibly bound to his singularity. Voltaire depicts eighteenth-century men of letters as being more independent than their predecessors and their peers: “Ils ont d’ordinaire plus d’indépendance dans l’esprit que les autres hommes.”<sup>19</sup> This sense of singularity was accorded much importance by Voltaire’s contemporaries, including Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who states in *Mon Bonnet de nuit* (first published in 1766) that “l’homme de lettres vit dans une noble indépendance.”<sup>20</sup> Although the independence of which Voltaire and Mercier write is primarily political and economic in nature, in that the writer is not beholden to any vested interests,

15. Joan DeJean, “How Often Did Authors Write Alone? Ways of Becoming an Author in Early Modern France,” *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Several Authors, One Pen*, ed. Seth Whidden (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 19.

16. See, for instance, Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); and Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660–1710* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

17. There are, nonetheless, some analyses of particular instances of collaboration in eighteenth-century French letters: François Moureau, *Dufresny, auteur dramatique (1657–1724)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979) 52–67, 117–33; Judith Curtis and David Trott, eds., *Histoire et recueil des Lazzis*, SVEC 338 (1996); and Judith Curtis, “‘Divine Thalie’: The Career of Jeanne Quinault,” SVEC (2007):09, especially 90–110.

18. Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?,” *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1 1954–1969, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 800. Jack Stillinger lays out some of the theoretical implications of collaborative writing in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 182–202.

19. Voltaire, “Gens de lettres,” *Encyclopédie*, 7:600.

20. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, “Écrivains,” *Mon Bonnet de nuit*, 4 vols. (Lausanne, 1788) 4:136.

it is also of an aesthetic order. Describing the moments that a man of letters spends “dans la solitude,” Mercier depicts a model of ecstatic literary creation:

Le souffle inspirateur se répand dans son âme, son coeur s'échauffe, son imagination s'allume, un frémissement délicieux soule sans ses veines, l'enthousiasme le saisit: sur des ailes de feu, son esprit s'élance, il franchit les limites du monde, il plane au haut des cieux: là il contemple, il embrasse la vertu dans sa perfection; il s'enflamme pour elle jusqu'au ravissement et à l'extase. Je vois son front riant tourné vers le ciel, des larmes de joie coulent de ses yeux, l'amour sacré du genre humain pénètre son coeur d'une vive tendresse, son sang bouillonne, la rapidité de ses esprits entraîne celle de ses idées: c'est alors qu'il peint avec sentiment, qu'il lance les foudres d'une mâle éloquence, qu'il crée ces chefs-d'oeuvre, l'admiration des siècles.<sup>21</sup>

This model of literary creation, whereby inspiration or “enthousiasme” unites the creator’s body and soul, is also found in Antoine-Léonard Thomas’s *discours de réception* at the Académie Française on January 22, 1767: “Dans l’émotion qu’on éprouve, le cœur palpite, les traits changent, les larmes coulent; l’âme, portée hors d’elle-même, ne sent, ne vit, n’existe plus que dans l’âme de l’écrivain qui l’anime et qui lui dicte avec empire tous ses mouvements.”<sup>22</sup> Such inspired writing is necessarily a solitary activity, but even a more measured kind of intellectual reflection is seemingly predicated on the agent’s solitude: “Un philosophe qui médite seul, qui scrute différents objets, qui les examine tranquillement sous tous leurs rapports, est de plus en état d’approcher la vérité qu’une assemblée d’hommes qui discutent, délibèrent, argumentent.”<sup>23</sup> In stressing the singularity of the great writer, legitimate literary creation excludes any second parties, and thereby seems to preclude collaboration. Yet when, on October 20, 1761, Voltaire relates to Charles de Fyot how he composed his tragedy *Olympie* in a “moment d’enthousiasme” (D10084), collaboration comes into play:

Vous devez savoir, en qualité de génie, que le sujet d’une tragédie me passait par la tête. Je ne voulais ni de froide politique ni de froide rhétorique ni de froides amours. J’ai trouvé tout ce que les

21. Mercier, *Mon Bonnet de nuit*, 4:160, 158–59.

22. Antoine-Léonard Thomas, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Didot l’aîné, 1772) 4:171.

23. Mercier, “Le Bonheur des gens de lettres,” *Mon Bonnet de nuit*, 1:198.

plus grands noms ont de plus imposant, tout ce que la religion secrète des anciens, si sottement calomniée par nous, avait de plus auguste, de plus terrible, et de plus consolant, ce que les passions ont de plus déchirant, les grandeurs de ce monde de plus vain et de plus misérable, et les infortunes humaines de plus affreux. Ce sujet s'est emparé de moi avec tant de violence que j'ai fait la pièce en six jours, en comptant un peu les nuits. Ensuite il a fallu corriger. Voilà pourquoi je vous remercie si tard de toutes les bontés dont vous m'honorez.

Voltaire may have drafted *Olympie* at great speed, but the play can be completed only when other individuals suggest how the text may be improved. Voltaire was able to legitimize this process of consultation through reference to France's most celebrated tragedians (D9959): "Corneille ne consultait personne, et Racine consultait Boileau. Ainsi l'un tomba toujours depuis *Héraclius*, et l'autre s'éleva continuellement." Literary creation is not a unique and isolated moment. When each stage of the text's genesis is taken into account, it is clear that two seemingly opposed models of writing—singular and collective—can coexist. Jean-François de La Harpe makes this point in his *discours de réception* at the Académie Française on June 20, 1776, when he argues that the enthusiastic poet requires the advice of his peers to improve his work's quality:

Semblable à ces anciens interprètes des Dieux [. . .] il conserve encore, en descendant du trépied, quelque chose de religieux et de farouche. À qui donc pourra-t-il mieux s'adresser qu'à ceux qui ne sont point étrangers aux impressions qu'il éprouve? Ce sont eux qui lui montreront de quoi il peut s'applaudir, et ce qu'il doit se reprocher. C'est chez eux qu'il trouvera cette critique réfléchie et lumineuse qui indique la source des illusions et des erreurs, et des moyens de les réparer; cette expression d'une estime sentie et raisonnée, qui adoucit la blessure que la vérité sévère fait toujours à l'amour-propre; ce sentiment vif des beautés, qui console du travail de corriger les fautes, et donne le courage d'envisager la perfection. Enfin, c'est auprès d'eux qu'il peut apprendre à joindre à l'énergie créatrice, cette autre force qui achève et polit l'ouvrage, force non moins rare, et dont l'usage est peut-être plus pénible, parce qu'elle agit sans enthousiasme.

What La Harpe terms the "communication libre et franche des idées" may be considered a collaborative act, for the initial author reworks the text in light of invited input from other individuals. Collaboration may be therefore

understood as more than coauthorship, whereby two or more writers conceive of a text and write it together, line by line, passage by passage. Joseph de Laporte and Jean-Marie Clément identify some of the diverse modes of collective authorship when they describe Madame Favart's working methods: "Madame Favart a eu effectivement part aux pièces où l'on a mis son nom, tant pour les sujets qu'elle indiquait, les canevas qu'elle préparait, et les choix des airs, que par les pensées qu'elle fournissait, les couplets qu'elle composait, et différents vaudevilles dont elle faisait la musique."<sup>24</sup> The editors of Brueys and Palaprat's plays also give a broad sense of collaboration: "Ils n'ont rien de caché l'un pour l'autre: projets de pièces; idées de scène, tout est commun entre eux; nulle dispute sur le genre de l'ouvrage, et sur le plus ou moins de travail."<sup>25</sup> If collaboration is essentially the process by which two or more individuals contribute to the final text, then those contributions can occur at any moment of the text's genesis: initial suggestion, joint composition, welcomed feedback—these are all instances of collaboration. Whatever the mode and extent of collaboration, it must be "consensual," in that all participants involved should recognize that each contribution is valid, voluntary, and invited, for otherwise it is not collaboration but plagiarism or unwelcome intervention.

The distinction between invited contributions and unsolicited interventions is especially sharp in theater, given that it is by definition a collective activity in which numerous agents participate (poet, actor, decorator, *machiniste*, sometimes composer and musician). That not all these contributors are equal is all the more evident when one adopts an Aristotelian hierarchy that privileges the poet over the other agents. This is certainly Voltaire's view of dramatic creation, as shown in his letter of December 16, 1760, to the actor Henri Lekain (D9472): "L'intérêt doit être dans les choses qu'on dit, et non pas dans de vaines décorations; l'appareil, la pompe, la position des acteurs, le jeu muet sont nécessaires; mais c'est quand il en résulte quelque beauté, c'est quand toutes ces choses ensemble redoublent le noeud et l'intérêt." Voltaire

24. Joseph de Laporte and Jean-Marie Clément, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, 3 vols. (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1775) 3:187. Mme Favart is something of an exception, given that reports of women and coauthorship do not usually portray reciprocal relationships, suggesting instead that their literary success owes much to the male collaborator. We read, for instance, that Catherine Bernard "était fort liée avec Fontenelle, et l'on a prétendu, avec assez de vraisemblance, qu'il avait eu part à ses deux tragédies qui sont, *Léodamie*, et *Brutus*, et même à ses autres ouvrages," and that Mlle Barbier's affair with the abbé Pellegrin "a fait regarder ce dernier comme le principal auteur de tous les ouvrages qu'elle donnait" (Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres* [Paris, 1763] 511, 502).

25. David-Augustin de Brueys and Palaprat, *Oeuvres de théâtre, nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1755) 2:101.



may have reworked *Irène* in the light of the “avis éclairés” he had sought out, but he vehemently rejected unsolicited amendments as interference:

On avait changé quelques vers dans *Irène* aux répétitions de laquelle la maladie de l’auguste vieillard l’empêchait d’assister. [. . .] Le voilà feuilletant, lisant, corrigeant; il parvient enfin aux vers intercalés. Quel massacre! Quel écrivassier, quel plat rimailleur a sali ma pièce avec son infect fumier, s’écrie-t-il. Qui a eu l’audace de corriger mon ouvrage, et de s’y prendre d’une manière aussi gauche!<sup>26</sup>

A play text is singularly susceptible to rewriting by agents other than the author, even after his or her death; this was the case when the Comédie-Italienne accepted a comedy by Voltaire on April 21, 1782: “Fait lecture d’une pièce nouvelle intitulée *Charlot, ou la Comtesse de Givri*, imprimée dans les oeuvres de Voltaire, et retouchée par M. le chevalier de Florian.”<sup>27</sup>

Collaboration’s consensual nature is evident in the principal term by which the eighteenth century describes collective authorship. The word *collaboration* was not used in the period, and instead the practice was denoted by such terms as the prosaic “travailler ensemble”<sup>28</sup> and “conjointement”<sup>29</sup> as well as “conférer.”<sup>30</sup> Euphemism might also be used, as when Harny de Guerville refers to Charles Favart when describing the composition of *Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne* (first performed in 1753): “Il est permis à un écolier d’avoir quelque prédilection pour son maître. C’est lui qui m’a donné les premières leçons de l’art dramatique. *Bastien* a été fait sous ses yeux.”<sup>31</sup> Above all, “société” and its cognates (“s’associer” and “associé”) were employed; thus, one reads of “les fruits de sa [Palaprat] société avec M. de Brueys,”<sup>32</sup>

26. Roselyne Laplace, “Autour de la création d’*Irène*,” *SVEC* 2005:05: 49–50. Voltaire often employs terms of violent disfiguration or mutilation to describe the rewriting of his plays by other hands: see, for instance, D5957, D6579, D9404, D11774, D14427, and D18186.

27. Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, Th Oc. 115, 31r. Given the absence of the prompt’s copy, it is impossible to know the extent to which Philippe Antoine de Florian reworked his uncle-in-law’s play. On the posthumous reworking of plays and the implications for authorship, see Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004).

28. “La Vie de Monsieur de Brueys,” Brueys and Palaprat, *Oeuvres de théâtre*, 1:lv.

29. Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres* (Paris, 1763) 672.

30. Moureau, *Dufresny*, 54.

31. Harny de Guerville, *Le Petit-maître en province* (Paris, 1772) i. I thank Mark Darlow for alerting me to this text.

32. Brueys and Palaprat, *Oeuvres de théâtre*, 1:lix.

that Charles Favart “a donné à nos spectacles réguliers, seul ou en société, beaucoup de pieces,”<sup>33</sup> and that Thomas Laffichard “était de la société de Pannard, Valos, d’Orville et Gallet; et a fait avec eux plusieurs pièces dont il leur a, dit-on, abandonné toute la gloire.”<sup>34</sup> Voltaire uses the word negatively when he complains about Pierre Louis de Maupertuis: “Il a eu la cruauté d’envoyer à Paris une cinquantaine d’exemplaires du *Tombeau de la Sorbonne*, et de m’attribuer cet indigne ouvrage en société avec M. l’Abbé de Prades.”<sup>35</sup> The term *société* disavows the notion of labor and commerce (this is also the case in writings about fairground theater), and privileges instead convivial and social pleasures, as demonstrated in the metatheatrical work *L’Avantage de l’esprit* in which the marquis de Surgères declares to the comte de Caylus: “De plus l’on sait bien que ni vous ni moi ne sommes point et ne serons jamais des auteurs; l’on n’ignore pas non plus que sans l’amusement de notre société nous ne ferions pas de semblables ouvrages.”<sup>36</sup> Without identifying or analyzing the term *société*, some scholars have nevertheless been attentive to the social aspect of collaborative authorship; describing the collaboration between Jean-François Regnard and Charles Dufresny, François Moureau writes of an “esprit forgé dans des lieux où les plaisirs n’étaient pas toujours grossiers,”<sup>37</sup> and John Iverson notes that during Voltaire’s career “conviviality and creativity went hand in hand.”<sup>38</sup> But there is more at stake in such collective ventures than simply social pleasures, and one should be wary of taking at face value such statements that speak of collaborative practices solely in terms of sociability, as when Voltaire writes to Marie Jean de Condorcet on January 12, 1778 (D20979): “On ne fait rien de bon dans les arts d’imagination et de goût, sans le secours d’un ami éclairé.” To privilege friendship in this manner is a frequent and long-standing rhetorical gesture—“Notre seul souci a été d’affirmer publiquement nos véritables amities et, en même temps, nos tendances littéraires” states the preliminary note to the collective work *Soirées*

33. Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif*, 574. The names of Favart’s collaborators are indicated in the tables of contents in the *Théâtre de M. Favart, ou recueil des comédies, parodies et opéra-comiques qu’il a donnés jusqu’à ce jours*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1763–72).

34. Laporte and Clément, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, 3:245. Nicholas Cronk has argued that this may indeed be a collaborative work; ‘La première publication du Tombeau de la Sorbonne (1752)’, *Revue Voltaire* 10 (2010), 203–10.

35. Letter dated approximately January 15, 1753, D5153.

36. Quoted in Dominique Quéro, “Autour de la ‘Société de Morville’ et de trois prologues de Caylus (1731–1733),” *Le Comte de Caylus: les arts et les lettres*, ed. Nicholas Cronk and Kris Peeters (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 175.

37. Moureau, *Dufresny*, 54.

38. John R. Iverson, “‘Le Dîner des philosophes’: Conviviality and Collaboration in the French Enlightenment,” Whidden, *Models of Collaboration*, 32.

*de Médan*<sup>39</sup>—but in focusing on the sociable aspects of collaboration, one risks misrecognizing the participants' political intent.

Collaboration is a technique of strategic sociability. Participants mobilize social connections for literary activities, or conversely deploy art for social purposes. The collaborative ventures of the comte de Caylus exemplify the first strategy; Mlle Quinault's Société-du-Bout-du-Banc gave him the space in which to write, but wary of being compromised by publicly acknowledged authorship, he could efface his involvement and allow the work to be attributed to a colleague with a different sense of decorum.<sup>40</sup> The sense that it was unbecoming for a gentleman of rank to be publicly acknowledged as a dramatist persisted late into the century. When Marie-Anoinette forbade the comte de Tilly from having a play performed, he asked, "Y a-t-il du mal à faire représenter?," to which she replied, "Du mal, non: mais cela ne convient pas. [. . .] Il ne faut pas qu'un gentilhomme, et à votre âge, se donne en spectacle."<sup>41</sup> That dramatic collaboration was a means by which an individual might partake of literary pleasures yet avoid potentially damaging social exposure is evidenced in the early career of the abbé de Brueys:

Comme notre auteur n'était pas apparemment convaincu des raisons que l'on allègue pour condamner la comédie, il se serait plutôt laissé aller à son penchant, si des motifs de politique et de bienséance ne l'eussent arrêté. M. Palaprat, son ami et son compatriote, en lui offrant de travailler ensemble dans un genre qu'ils aimaient tous deux, leva toutes les difficultés, et donna par là à notre auteur le moyen de satisfaire son goût, sans compromettre son état et sa réputation.<sup>42</sup>

Even if initially disavowed, collaboration can subsequently serve as a way for one to establish one's status as an author, for when Brueys heard that *Le Grondeur* was circulating as a work attributed to Palaprat and Campistron, he asserted his right to be publicly recognized as its creator:

Je vous avoue, mon cher patron, qu'à cette nouvelle qui m'a été donnée dans ma solitude, ma tendresse de père s'est réveillée; et je n'ai pu m'empêcher de rendre publique une vérité qui vous est

39. Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, J.-K. Huysmans, Henry Céard, Léon Hennique, and Paul Alexis, *Les Soirées de Médan* (Paris: Charpentier, 1880), unpaginated.

40. Jacqueline Hellegour'h, "Notes sur Caylus et l'écriture collective au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 106 (2006): 405–22.

41. *Mémoires du comte Alexandre de Tilly pour servir à l'histoire des mœurs de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986) 73.

42. "La Vie de Monsieur de Brueys," Brueys and Palaprat, *Oeuvres de théâtre*, 1:lv.

connue, et à tout Paris; c'est un en mot que le *Grondeur*, le *Muet*, l'*Important*, et les *Empyriques*, sont véritablement mes enfants; que vous aviez bien voulu prendre soin de leur éducation, les produire dans le monde, les enrichir même de vos biens, et me faire l'honneur de les adopter.<sup>43</sup>

Brueys does not claim to have written the plays alone ("vous aviez bien voulu [. . .] les enrichir même de vos biens"), and dual paternity does not provoke the same anxiety that it does in Piron or Beaumarchais; rather, he publicizes the collaboration to assert his own creative talents. Moreover, the acknowledgment of collaboration can enhance the social capital of an established author, as evidenced in Palaprat's own "Discours sur le *Concert ridicule*":

On a mis sous mon nom tant de pièces de théâtre, que si par cette nouvelle édition je ne faisais pas une déclaration publique de celles que nous avouons mon ami et moi, un plus long silence de ma part serait criminel; et quelque horreur que j'aie toujours eue pour l'ombre la plus éloignée de tout ce qui peut seulement avoir l'air du plagiat, on pourrait m'accuser avec raison de quelque chose encore pire, qui serait de vouloir imposer au public sur plusieurs ouvrages, dont il y en a de très bons, et que je souhaiterais fort d'avoir faits.

In no way does this gesture diminish Palaprat's standing in the eyes of his editors. On the contrary, this gesture is valued as an act of *honnêteté* that should boost and secure the author's reputation: "C'est moins pour faire connaître la part qu'a eu [*sic*] M. de Brueys à ces deux pièces,<sup>44</sup> que pour publier la sincérité et le désintéressement de son généreux associé [. . .]. Un auteur aussi équitable, est un exemple à ne pas laisser ignorer quoi qu'il ait déjà été peu suivi."<sup>45</sup>

Collaboration, as noted above, also allows the participants to engage in art for social purposes. One of Voltaire's early collaborative ventures exemplifies the dual process by which a playwright might derive legitimacy from his fellow participants, and by which those participants also benefit from their association with the author. The play in question is *La Fête de Bélesbat*, a one-act farce created and performed in November 1725 at the estate of the marquis de Livry at Bélesbat.<sup>46</sup> The work has received little critical attention;

43. Qtd. in "Discours sur *Le Grondeur*," *Oeuvres de théâtre*, 2:xii.

44. *Le Concert ridicule* and *Le Secret révélé*.

45. Brueys and Palaprat, *Oeuvres de théâtre*, 2:103.

46. The name of the château is spelled variously as Bélesbat, Belebat, Belesbat, Bélébat, and Bellebat.

the authors of the recent scholarly edition of the work touch on the question of collaboration,<sup>47</sup> and Russell Goulbourne focuses on Voltaire's assimilation of popular comic traditions.<sup>48</sup> Although Jacques Scherer has described it one of Voltaire's "péchés de jeunesse,"<sup>49</sup> one might argue instead that that the work is a key moment in the self-fashioning by a young man in the company of the most powerful people in the kingdom.

At this stage of his career Voltaire had accumulated some cultural capital, albeit of an ambiguous nature; his first tragedy *Oedipe* had been a triumph in 1718, and *La Ligue* (soon to be called *La Henriade*) enjoyed immediate success after its initial publication in 1724, yet he had gained "a somewhat dangerous reputation as a poet of unusual talent" in the Regency,<sup>50</sup> and his plays *Artémire* and *Mariamne* were failures. His social capital was far from solid; the dedication of *La Henriade* to Louis XV was rejected, and Voltaire needed to gain legitimacy from other established figures. France's most powerful man at the time was the duc de Bourbon, prime minister to the thirteen-year-old king, and the duc and his mistress Mme de Prie, daughter of the tax farmer Berthelot de Pléneuf, had succeeded in breaking off Louis XV's proposed marriage to the Spanish Infanta and in substituting Marie Leszczyńska, daughter of the deposed king of Poland. Intimately connected to the highest echelon of power, Mme de Prie thus enjoyed immense social capital, that is to say, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition [. . .] which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word."<sup>51</sup> Seeking to become part of this network, Voltaire hoped thereby to borrow some of that social capital against his own cultural capital and to establish himself in some kind of post, as he told Thieriot on October 17, 1725 (D253): "J'ai pensé assez solidement pour sentir que des louanges sont peu de choses, et que le rôle d'un poète à la cour, quelque agréable qu'il puisse être, traîne toujours avec lui un peu de ridicule, et qu'il n'est pas permis d'être en ce pays-ci sans aucun établissement. On me donne tous les jours des espérances." Bourdieu notes that the "cultural capital of the courtier [. . .] can yield only ill-defined profits, of fluctuating value, in the market of high-society exchanges,"<sup>52</sup> and indeed Voltaire found the task of exchanging symbolic credit for more

47. Roger J. V. Cotte and Paul Gibbard, OCV 3A:143–47.

48. Russell Goulbourne, *Voltaire Comic Dramatist*, SVEC 2006:03:37–51.

49. *Théâtre et anti-théâtre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 12.

50. Nicholas Cronk, "Preface," OCV, 3A:xxi.

51. Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 86.

52. Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 85.

concrete returns both demanding and frustrating (D252): “Je me suis trouvé presque toujours en l’air, maudissant la vie de courtisan, courant inutilement après une petite fortune qui semblait se présenter à moi, et qui s’est enfui bien vite dès que j’ai cru la tenir.” In August 1725 he had dedicated *L’Indiscret* to Mme de Prie, but given that an initial act of institution cannot fully constitute a network, he needed to transform these fleeting relations—“fumées de cour” (D253)—into a more substantial asset, namely, *La Fête de Bélesbat*.

Critics have noted that this farce may be the result of coauthorship with René de Bonneval and Charles-Jean-François Hénault on the basis that the two men are thanked in lines 437–45 and 446–58, respectively.<sup>53</sup> Convincing evidence of Bonneval’s participation has not yet been found, and it is unlikely that Voltaire would have willingly collaborated with the author of the hostile *Réflexions critiques sur un poème intitulé La Ligue*, which had been published in 1724. Voltaire’s recollection of Bonneval some years later hardly indicates a warm relationship (October 22, 1738, D1632): “Je ne connais Bonneval, que pour l’avoir vu une fois chez madame de Prie, où il m’emprunta dix louis qu’il ne m’a jamais rendus”; when Bonneval wrote to Voltaire on February 27, 1745 (D3078), asking for more money, he remarked that they had almost never seen each other since 1725. Recently, however, we have been able to provide documentary proof that the président Hénault collaborated on the work.<sup>54</sup> Born in 1685 to a rich tax farmer, Hénault entered the *parlement* in 1706 and joined the Académie Française on December 23, 1723, after the death of the cardinal Dubois. As well as occupying a high social status, Hénault had accrued some cultural capital, for in 1707 the Académie crowned his essay *Il ne peut y avoir de vrai bonheur pour l’homme que dans la pratique des vertus*, and he had gained some renown for his poetry: “Dans les premières années que j’entrai dans le monde (1712), je donnai quelques chansons qui firent faire attention à moi.”<sup>55</sup> Voltaire and Hénault had known each other for a few years, and the latter had apparently snatched the manuscript of *La Ligue* from a fire.<sup>56</sup> Collaborating with such a well-established figure was thus

53. Henri Thirion, *Voltaire chez madame de Prie: Les fêtes de Bellébat* (Versailles: Bernard, 1903) 17; Pomeau, *Voltaire en son temps*, 1:151; Manuel Couvreur, “*La Fête de Belesbat*,” *Dictionnaire général de Voltaire*, ed. Raymond Trousson and Jerom Vercruysse (Paris: H. Champion, 2003) 517; and Goulbourne, *Voltaire Comic Dramatist*, 37.

54. Thomas Wynn, “A Note on the Authorship of Voltaire’s *La Fête de Bélébat*,” *French Studies Bulletin* 101 (2006): 99–101.

55. Charles-Jean-François Hénault, *Mémoires du président Hénault* (Paris: Hachette, 1911) 22.

56. See Hénault, *Mémoires*, ed. François Rousseau (Paris, 1911), 33; and *La Henriade*, ed. O. R. Taylor, OCV 2:34–35.

a way for Voltaire to capitalize on his fellow author's social credit; through honorable relationships of reciprocity and symmetry, collaboration can be mobilized in the author's constant task of self-fashioning.

The product no less than the process of this collaborative venture can be considered in the light of legitimation. Bourdieu remarks that the transformation of contingent relationships is effected "through the alchemy of *consecration*" whereby the individual is symbolically constituted as a relative "or as a knight, an heir, an elder, etc."<sup>57</sup> In light of this remark, it is striking to see that *La Fête de Bélesbat* features the consecration of Voltaire, chosen by the curé de Courdimanche as his successor:

Que de tous côtés on entende  
Le beau nom de Voltaire, et qu'il soit célébré.  
Est-il pour nous une gloire plus grande?  
L'auteur d'*Oedipe* est devenu curé.<sup>58</sup>

Voltaire—author of the contentious lines "Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense, / Notre crédulité fait toute leur science" (*Oedipe*, IV, 1)—is thus ironically instituted as the spiritual guide for the elite audience and its associates, including the duc de Bourbon, Mme de Prie, and her brother M. de Berthelot de Montchesne, *intendant des finances*, all of whom are addressed in the play. This provocative tone is not inimical to the institution of social relations and to subsequent recognition, for as Michael Farrell argues, this kind of delinquency is a key feature of collaborative ventures: "Collaborative circles usually form among persons in their twenties or early thirties. Although the participants are usually well beyond adolescence, in many ways the dynamics of a [collaborative] circle resemble those of a delinquent gang. By definition, creative work is deviant, in that, in form or content, it does not conform to established traditions in the field. Particularly in the early stages of the development of a circle, as members are developing a culture that encourages creativity, they are often more than simply innovative—they are deliberately provocative toward those in authority. During this period, the work sometimes resembles acts of vandalism, in which the members desecrate symbols of authority in their field."<sup>59</sup> The elite participants in *La Fête de Bélesbat* are hardly anti-establishment vandals, but Farrell illuminates why the work's tone and content are instrumental to its social purposes. Just as the play's carnivalesque tone allows the participants to enjoy the fiction

57. Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 87.

58. Voltaire, *La Fête de Bélesbat*, OCV 3A:173.

59. Michael Farrell, *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics and Creative Work* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001) 14.



that they are a group apart, so it also means that the strategic exchange of capital can be disavowed (as mere fun) at the very moment of its realization. Voltaire gains in social capital, the other participants borrow his (agreeably dangerous) cultural capital, and all the while everyone subscribes to a story of decorous equality and commonality, for as Voltaire writes in the play's dedication, "Nous sommes tous devenus ici poètes et musiciens, sans pourtant être devenus bizarres."<sup>60</sup>

In the social economy as described by Bourdieu, the capital transactions never cease: "The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed."<sup>61</sup> Collaboration, in its various modalities, offers new opportunities for the author to accrue credit in a changing political landscape. To stay with the case of Voltaire, he continued to collaborate until the end of his long life, as the anecdote at the start of this article demonstrates. He continued to send his plays to chosen correspondents for what one might term "peer review," and indeed he sent his *Commentaires sur Corneille* to the Académie Française in October 1761 (D10053): "L'Académie juge, je rectifie, je renvoie le manuscrit en mettant des n.b. en marge aux endroits corrigés et aux nouveaux. L'Académie juge en dernier ressort, alors je me conforme avec soin à sa décision, je polis le style, je jette quelques poignées de fleurs sur mes commentaires comme le voulait le cardinal de Richelieu." It seems likely that Voltaire also collaborated with Chabanon during his stay at Ferney, for he writes to the comte and comtesse d'Argental on March 24, 1766 (D13218): "Je ne vous dirai rien non plus de M. de Chabanon; je ne vous dirai pas que je lui ai donné un sujet que je crois très intéressant et très tragique." There is the possibility that he also collaborated with La Harpe, for given his request to Damilaville to send the young writer (still in Paris) a complete set of plays—"Ce n'est pas qu'assurément je prétende lui donner des modèles de tragédies; mais je suis bien aise de lui montrer quelques petites attentions dans son malheur en cas que je ne lui aie pas déjà fait ce présent" (D13232)—a remark such as "La Harpe vient demain travailler chez moi" (D13744) might imply that the patriarch wished to give the younger poet some more direct advice, thereby confirming his own cultural capital.

This is not to say that collaboration should be viewed solely as a technique of strategic sociability; critics are correct to see Voltaire's later opera collaborations *Samson* and *La Princesse de Navarre* through the prism of aesthetic experimentation,<sup>62</sup> but to discount these works' circulation in the

60. Voltaire, *La Fête de Bélesbat*, OCV 3A:157.

61. Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 87.

62. See, for instance, Catherine Kintzler, "Rameau et Voltaire: Les Enjeux théoriques d'une collaboration orageuse," *Revue de Musicologie* 67 (1981): 139–68; and



social economy would be to ignore their mobilization for strategic ends. Equally, Voltaire's frequent practice of sending his plays to chosen individuals was no doubt partly motivated by the desire to produce a "better" play, but those people who were invited to comment more often than not enjoyed considerable social capital; the d'Argental couple, for instance, were often asked to review early drafts of plays and would reply with substantial comments such as the "Observations de M. d'Argental sur *Olympie*," the "Observations sur *Les Scythes*," and the "Humble réplique sur *Les Scythes*."<sup>63</sup> Literary collaboration offers the participants the space to discuss other topics. When, for instance, Voltaire asked the cardinal de Bernis for his opinions on an early draft of *Olympie*, he addressed his correspondent in terms of his status (October 26, 1761, D10100): "Vous êtes honnête homme et vous n'en prendrez point de copie, vous me la renverrez fidèlement. Mais ce n'est pas assez d'être honnête homme. C'est à vos lumières, à vos bontés, à vos critiques que j'ai recours. Que le cardinal me bénisse et que l'académicien m'éclaire; je vous en conjure." The slight irony of Voltaire's address does not blunt the appeal to Bernis's doubly impressive status. Bernis did indeed make recommendations to Voltaire (December 10, D10201), many of which the playwright took on (D10210), and this literary participation led the men to other interests, for as the cardinal told Voltaire on February 4, 1762 (D10307): "Je m'empresse, mon cher confrère, de vous faire mon compliment bien sincère sur le rétablissement de votre pension; j'en suis encore plus aise pour l'honneur des lettres que pour vous-même, quoiqu'il soit fort agréable d'éprouver les bontés de son maître que de faire un peu enrager ses ennemis." Just as the cardinal sidelines Voltaire's personal financial gain for wider literary prestige, so does their literary collaboration usefully allow them to treat nonliterary, more explicitly political matters of self-interest. Even when collaboration does not serve as a decorous gloss by which to misrecognize hard-nosed politicking, the practice can be understood as a political gesture in itself. Voltaire's decision to send *Irène* to those "gens de goût de sa connaissance" upon his return to Paris is doubtless motivated by the need to borrow against his immense cultural capital and to confirm and strengthen social relations at a time when his social capital was still uncertain given the king's refusal to meet him.<sup>64</sup>

Collaboration should be viewed under the sign of vitality rather than morbidity. It marks not the death but the emergence of the author. It is a

Goulbourne, *Voltaire Comic Dramatist*, 119–47.

63. OCV 52:379–85; and *L'Institut et Musée Voltaire en 1986*, ed. Charles Wirz, (Geneva, 1987) 2–3.

64. *Correspondance secrète entre Marie-Thérèse et le Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, avec les lettres de Marie-Thérèse et de Marie-Antoinette*, ed. Alfred d'Arneht and M. A. Geffroy, 3 vols. (Paris, 1874) 3:181.

plural act, for not only does collaboration involve more than one writer, it is also repeated in the complex process of self-fashioning. The author is never fully and finally constituted, and the various modes of collaboration allow the individual to engage in the perpetual elaboration of authorship and to respond to new and particular political contingencies and configurations. There is more research to be done in this field; it is not yet clear if and how the perception of collaboration changed in this period; the links between collaboration, plagiarism, and originality remain murky; and the complex relationships between collaboration and genre, as well as those between collaboration and gender, have yet to be substantially analyzed. But further investigation into collective, decentered, and dependent writing may offer us clearer insights into the practical, political, and ethical dimensions of eighteenth-century authorship.

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